

CAPSULE SUMMARY

BA-3119

Back River Neck African American Survey District

Baltimore County, MD

1915-1950s

In the early 20th century, Back River Neck, the land between Baltimore and the Middle River, was still largely agrarian. According to the 1877 G.M. Hopkins Atlas of Baltimore County there is only one building sited directly on the road, the school house west of Sue Creek of the Middle River. None of the names shown on the 1877 Atlas are familiar African American family names such as the ones listed in the 1920 census. In 1878, the congregation of St. Stephens's African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church (BA-3126), was sold land on Back River Neck Road. A log church was erected at this time and later replaced several times by newer edifices. By 1915, the area along Back River Neck Road between Normans Creek and Sues Creek became much more populated. A few of the new names listed since the 1877 atlas include Kirby, Bond, Grant, Miles, Dennis, Boston, Mercer, and Brown. In the town of Essex is the Walters "Colored" School.

The Back River Neck African American settlement is spread along Back River Neck Road, Browns Road, and Annetta Road. Few historic dwellings remain in the area most of them having been demolished or replaced by recent construction. Approximately 18 historic properties are located in the Back River Neck survey district. This linear survey district dates to circa 1915 to 1950s. The survey district is a rural district that is situated on a peninsula flanked by Middle River and Back River. The residences along Back River Road are sited near the road with only a few situated away from the road. Historic residences on Back River Neck Road range from one-story wood frame minimal tradition houses to wood-frame I-houses.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. BA-3119

1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic Back River Neck African American Survey District
other

2. Location

street and number Back River Neck Road, Browns Road, Annetta Road not for publication
city, town Essex X vicinity
county Baltimore County

3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Multiple Ownership
street and number telephone N/A
city, town state zip code

4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Baltimore County Courthouse tax map and parcel: tax map 97
city, town Towson liber folio

5. Primary Location of Additional Data

___ Contributing Resource in National Register District
___ Contributing Resource in Local Historic District
___ Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
___ Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
___ Recorded by HABS/HAER
___ Historic Structure Report or Research Report
___ Other

6. Classification

Category		Ownership	Current Function		Resource Count	
					Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district		<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade	<input type="checkbox"/> recreation/culture	18	23 buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> structure		<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> defense	<input type="checkbox"/> religion		sites
<input type="checkbox"/> site			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> domestic	<input type="checkbox"/> social		structures
<input type="checkbox"/> object			<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation		objects
			<input type="checkbox"/> funerary	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	18	23 Total
			<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> unknown		
			<input type="checkbox"/> health care	<input type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use		
			<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> other:		
					Number of Contributing Resources previously listed in the Inventory	
					0	

7. Description

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Condition

<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> altered

Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

The Back River Neck African American settlement is spread along Back River Neck Road, Browns Road, and Annetta Road. Few historic dwellings remain in the area most of them having been demolished or replaced by recent construction. Approximately 18 historic properties are located in the Back River Neck survey district. This linear survey district dates to circa 1915 to 1950s. It extends the length of Back River Neck Road and includes Browns Road, Annetta Road, and West Road. The survey district is a rural district that is situated on a peninsula flanked by Middle River and Back River. The residences along Back River Road are sited near the road with only a few situated away from the road. The properties have driveways and are surrounded by trees and bushes. The houses along the side roads of Brown Road, Annetta Road, and West Road are sited near the road and a portion of Brown Road and Annetta Road is on the waterfront.

One rock-faced concrete block dwelling is located at the terminus of Browns Road. Dating from 1920, this residence one story high and four bays wide featuring a single-leaf entry on the façade. The 6/1 wood-sash windows have thin wood sills. The hipped roof is sheathed with asphalt shingles and features slightly overhanging eaves. The door and windows are detailed with a paneled concrete-block surround.

Near the intersection of Browns Road and Annetta Road is a historic dwelling located on Annetta Road on the waterfront. It is one story high, three bays wide and is constructed of wood frame. The structural system is clad with wood shingles and the side-gable roof is covered with asphalt roll. A 3/1 wood-sash window pierces the façade as well as a single-leaf door and a 1/1 wood-sash window. This small house is set back from the road with a dirt and gravel driveway and is surrounded by mature trees.

Historic residences on Back River Neck Road range from one-story wood frame minimal tradition houses to wood-frame I-houses. The I-house at 831 Back River Neck Road is two-and-a-half stories, three bays wide, and is constructed of wood frame. Resting on a parged foundation, this house is clad with German vinyl siding and features a shed-roof porch on the façade supported with brick posts.

The 1930s bungalow at 626 Back River Neck Road is capped with a hipped roof and rests on a rock-faced concrete-block foundation. This dwelling rises one-and-a-half stories featuring a hipped-roof dormer and measures three bays across.

The two-story brick rowhouse at 521 Back River Neck Road is a particularly unique building type to be located in rural agricultural environment. Dating to the early 1920s, this building is constructed of five-course American brick bond. Measuring three bays wide, this building features a central entry with a single-leaf door illuminated with a one-light transom. A half-hipped roof porch covers the first story of the façade and is supported with brick posts. The shed roof has a heavy wood molded cornice with knee brackets and a paneled frieze. The 1/1 wood-sash windows have segmental arch lintels and rowlock brick sills.

The house at 343 Back River Neck Road is a wood-frame structure standing two-and-a-half stories high and two bays wide. It is capped with a side-gable roof above which rises an interior-center brick chimney and a gable dormer on the façade. The façade is pierced with 1/1 wood-sash windows and a single-leaf entry. The foundation of the house is not visible due to the replacement aluminum siding. A shed-roof porch covers the two bays on the façade.

8. Significance

Inventory No. BA-3119

Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science	
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime industry	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:	

Specific dates	1915-1950s	Architect/Builder	unknown
Construction dates	1915-1950s		

Evaluation for:

☐ National Register ☐ Maryland Register ☒ not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance reports, complete evaluation on a DOE Form - see manual.)

The land to the east of Baltimore remained predominantly rural through the mid-19th century, and historic atlases indicate that the town of Essex consisted of farmland occupied by B.E. Cook in 1877. The majority of the land was owned, however, by members of the Taylor family. Eastern and Mace Avenues were unimproved through the late 19th century across the Back River Neck between the Back and Middle Rivers.(1) In the early 20th century, the land between Baltimore and the Middle River was still largely agrarian. At this time, a streetcar line extended to the northeast from Baltimore along Eastern Avenue.(2) The community known as Essex was born in 1908 out of the development of land near the intersection of Eastern and Mace Avenues by the Taylor Land Company. The first dwelling constructed in the newly developed town was constructed shortly thereafter. Although schools, public services and religious institutions were established in Essex in the 1910s, the community's growth did not increase rapidly. The 1915 county atlas indicates that few structures existed on the city blocks created by the Taylor Land Company's survey of the area.(3) The town's development accelerated after the 1919 establishment of the Eastern Rolling Mill near the Essex community. The mill quickly became one of the primary employers in the area around the Back River. Worker housing quickly sprang up on the undeveloped lots that were part of the Paradise Resurveyed plat.(4)

According to the 1877 G.M. Hopkins Atlas of Baltimore County there is only one building sited directly on the road, the school house west of Sue Creek of the Middle River. None of the names shown on the 1877 Atlas are familiar African American family names such as the ones listed in the 1920 census.(5) In 1878, the congregation of St. Stephens's African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church was sold land on Back River Neck Road. A log church was erected at this time and later replaced several times by newer edifices. By 1915, the area along Back River Neck Road between Normans Creek and Sues Creek became much more populated. A few of the new names listed since the 1877 atlas include Kirby, Bond, Grant, Miles, Dennis, Boston, Mercer, and Brown.(6) In the town of Essex is the Walters "Colored" School.

A sampling of the 1920 United States Census lists twenty-five African American families on Back River Neck Road. The names include Bond, White, Kirby, Boston, Grant, Brown, Price, Adams, and Redford. The average number in a household is five with families having anywhere from two to eleven members. Of the twenty-five families only two wives worked outside of the house, both as family servants. The predominant occupation was farm laborer. Other male occupations included truck-farm laborer, well digger, ship-yard laborer, log-team driver, cutting-wood laborer, express driver, foundry laborer, mill laborer, and railroad watchman. All of the African American heads of households and spouses were able to read and write. Fourteen families rented their property and eleven owned their houses. Of the eleven that owned their houses, six properties were listed on the census as free and five had mortgages. A majority of the African American families originated from Maryland. Five heads of households were born in Virginia, two were born in Arkansas, one in Texas, one in New Jersey, and one in Alabama.(7)

According to John Brown in an interview for the Times, African American students attended St. Stephen's A.M.E. Church until the county provided schools. Once there were public schools for African American students the residents sent their children to the

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Continuation Sheet

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Walters School. For religious services, the African American communities of Back River Neck, Hopewell Avenue, and Goodwood was serviced by the St. Stephen's A.M.E. Church. A horse drawn shuttle service was set up by local residents to transport members that lived in Goodwood and along Back River Neck Road.(8)

ENDNOTES

1. George J. Martinak, "A Short History of Essex and Middle River" TMs (Photocopy), Department of English, Essex Community College, Essex, Maryland (May 1963), pp. 3-11; see also Atlas of Baltimore County, Maryland (Philadelphia, PA: G. M. Hopkins, 1877).
2. Martinak, p. 13.
3. Martinak, pp. 11-17; see also Map of Baltimore County (Philadelphia, PA: G. W. Bromley, 1915).
4. Neal A. Brooks and Eric G. Rockel, A History of Baltimore County (Towson, MD: Friends of the Towson Library, Inc., 1979), p. 326.
5. Atlas of Baltimore County, Maryland. (Philadelphia: G.M.Hopkins, 1877).
6. Atlas of Baltimore County, Maryland. (Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley, 1915).
7. U.S. Bureau of the Census, The Census of 1920, Baltimore County, Maryland. (National Archives).
8. Mike Preston, "John Brown: A Back River Neck Institution At 73," The Times, 21 July 1982, p. 3.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property 87 acres

Acreage of historical setting Unknown

Quadrangle name Middle River, MD

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

Verbal boundary description and justification

The Back River Neck African American Survey District is located in the area of Essex in the Fifteenth District of Baltimore County. The properties have been associated with tax map 97 since their construction.

11. Form Prepared By

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organization EHT Traceries, Inc.

date 6/10/03

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The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
DHCD/DHCP
100 Community Place
Crownsville MD 21032
410-514-7600

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Atlas of Baltimore County, Maryland. Philadelphia, PA: G. M. Hopkins, 1877.

Baltimore County Historic Inventory.

Brooks, Neal A. and Eric G. Rockel. A History of Baltimore County. Towson, MD: Friends of the Towson Library, Inc., 1979.

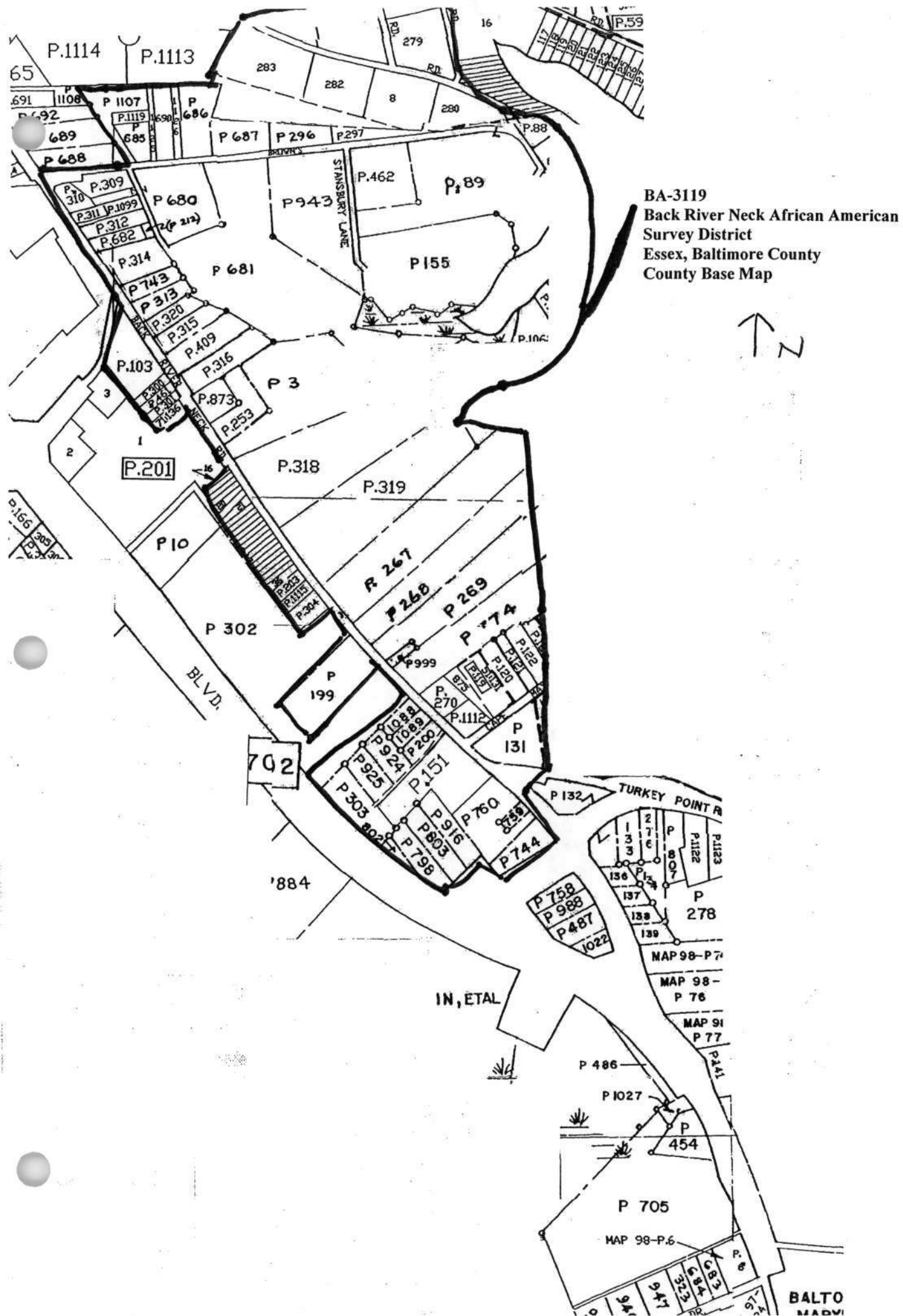
Map of Baltimore County. Philadelphia, PA: G. W. Bromley, 1915.

Preston, Mike. "John Brown: A Back River Neck Institution at 73." The Times. Baltimore: 21 July 1982.

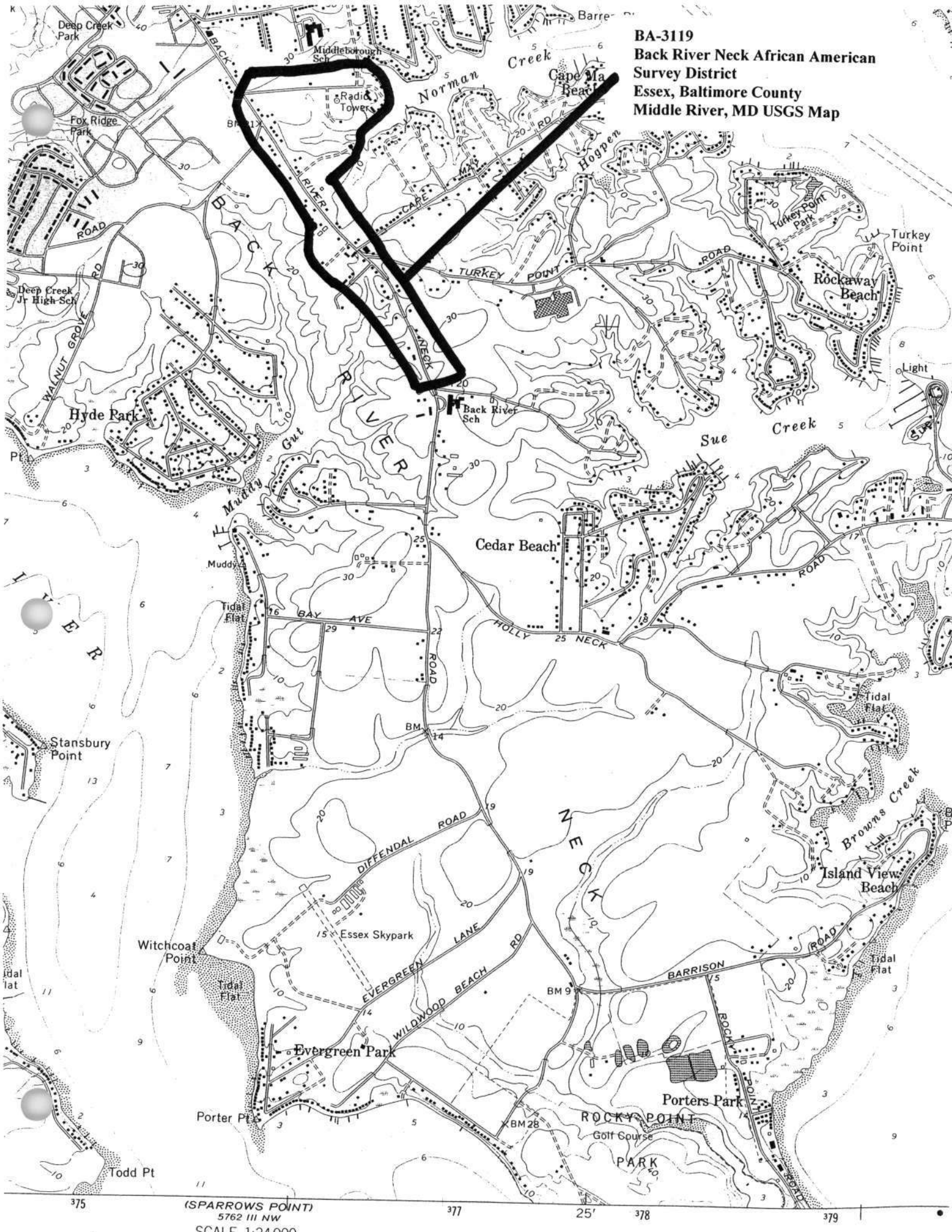
Scharf, J. Thomas. History of Baltimore City and County From the Earliest Period to the Present Day: Including Biographical Sketches of Their Representative Men. Philadelphia, PA: Louis H. Everts, 1881. Reprinted by Higginson Book Company, Salem, MA.

Sidney, J. C. Map of the City and County of Baltimore, Maryland, from Original Surveys. Baltimore, MD: James M. Stephens, 1850.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. The Census of 1930, Baltimore County, Maryland. National Archives.



BA-3119
Back River Neck African American
Survey District
Essex, Baltimore County
Middle River, MD USGS Map





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Back River Neck African-American Survey District

Baltimore County, MD

Traceries

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MD SHPO

Browns Road, view looking south-east

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Back River Neck African-American, survey District

Baltimore County, MD

Tracerics

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MD SHPO

Browns Road, view looking north

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Back River neck African-American survey district

Baltimore county, MD

Traceries

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MD SHPO

Annetta Road

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Back River Neck African-American survey
District

Baltimore County, MD

Traceries

6/2003

MD SHPO

616 Back River Neck Rd, view looking north-east

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Back River Neck African-American survey District

Baltimore County, MD

Traceries

6/2003

MD SHPO

52A-533 Back River Neck, view looking north

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Back River neck African-American survey
Baltimore County, MD District

Traceries

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MD SHPO

521 Back River neck Rd, view looking north

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Back River neck African-American survey District

Baltimore county, MD

Traceries

6/2003

MD SHPO

Back River neck Road

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